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RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0273
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 SUVA 000519

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [FJ](#)

SUBJECT: FIJI UPDATE 11/28: QARASE-BAINIMARAMA IN NZ; AMB
MEETING WITH RFMF SPURS FIERCE REACTION; UN THREATENS FIJI
PKO PARTICIPATION

REF: A. SUVA 518

[1](#)B. DINGER-DAVIES/MCGANN E-MAIL OF 11/28

[1](#)C. STATE 190257

Classified By: Amb. Dinger. Sec. 1.4 (B,D).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) Fiji PM Qarase and RFMF Commander Bainimarama have agreed to meet in New Zealand 11/29 under an agreement brokered by NZ FM Peters. The Ambassador and other diplomats had a useful, scheduled meeting with RFMF leaders in Suva. However, Bainimarama later reacted angrily, and the RFMF issued a scathing media release, to which the diplomats responded factually. Meanwhile, PM Qarase has invoked the Pacific Island Forum (PIF) Biketawa process. PIF Foreign Ministers are to meet in Sydney on Friday. According to media, UNSYG Annan has warned that a coup will result in the UN terminating all Fiji UN PKO operations. That presumably would include with UNAMI in Iraq. End summary.

Qarase/Bainimarama to meet in NZ; Hughes threatened

[1](#)2. (C) Per ref B, Fiji Police Commissioner Hughes informed us early on 11/28 that PM Qarase is traveling to New Zealand today on a NZ Air Force plane for a meeting with Bainimarama tomorrow. This apparently was brokered by NZ FM Peters in his 11/27 meeting with Bainimarama. Hughes told us the must-have RFMF demands are now down to three: firing Hughes; the controversial bills; and one other that he couldn't recall. The Aussie High Commissioner heard there are actually two more issues: disbanding the Police Tactical Response Unit and wiping the slate clean on criminal charges against the RFMF leadership. With the meeting, Bainimarama has postponed his return to Fiji until Wednesday or Thursday. Hughes and his family have received credible threats, reportedly from the RFMF. The family returned to Australia today. Hughes is taking some evasive actions but remains on the job.

RFMF leaders explain their concerns

[1](#)3. (C) As forecast Ref A, the Ambassador joined his colleagues from the UK and Australia in a meeting on 11/28 with Acting RFMF Commander Teleni and Land Forces Commander Driti. Each diplomat went through the talking points provided by governments. We drew from Ref C. Teleni and Driti then engaged in a heart-to-heart talk, attempting to explain what has been motivating the RFMF. They described a Fiji Government that has been publicly exuding cooperation

but privately not agreeing to meetings. They suggested that last May's elections were so faulty as to be illegitimate. They alleged extensive corruption and, at Bainimarama's urging, asked why foreign governments only criticize the RFMF but not the Government. They described their desire to protect the Fiji-Indian population from being discriminated against by the ethnic-Fijian majority. Driti clearly took the harder, Bainimarama-like line on the RFMF's expansive role. Teleni seemed more amenable to considering "rule of law" interests.

Diplomats raise concerns, note coup costs

¶4. (C) All three diplomats discussed the importance of the military taking its proper role in a democracy and the importance of allowing civil institutions such as review boards, auditors, and the judicial system to function and, as necessary, be strengthened. They described talking with the Government about needs for improved performance. They reminded the RFMF leaders of the tragic consequences for Fiji from past coups. They gave warning, with regret, of the consequences to the RFMF of another coup, including suspension of military programs. The Australian High Commissioner noted the Aussie defense cooperation program would cease, as would assistance for Fiji's Pacific patrol boats and help for PKO deployments. She also mentioned visas. Per Ref C, we raised U.S. military assistance and visas.

Teleni notes police investigation trigger

¶5. (C) At one point Teleni mentioned his view of why civil-military frictions erupted again two months ago after being quiet since the May elections. He said, after the RFMF

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had attempted to make peace, Home Affairs Minister Vosanibola sent Bainimarama a letter in September signaling that the Government intended to reinvestigate investigation of RFMF criminal activities. Teleni and Driti said that sparked Bainimarama's public outbursts just before he departed on a trip to the Sinai.

Worrisome context re NZ dialogue

¶6. (C) Teleni noted that PM Qarase is traveling to New Zealand to meet with Bainimarama and expressed hope that a face to face dialogue might permit a welcome outcome. Driti then suggested that, if Qarase accepts all the RFMF's current demands, "there could then be a smooth transition...." He did not elaborate on a transition to what.

Bainimarama bans Ambassador(s) from bases

¶7. (C) The entire meeting had a tone of collegial seriousness, reflecting past friendly relations and concerns about the present crisis that could dramatically alter mil/mil relationships. However, not long after the meeting concluded, Bainimarama phoned Embassy Suva's DATT from New Zealand in an angry mood. He asked why the Ambassador visited Queen Elizabeth Barracks (QEB). Brushing aside the DATT's explanation, Bainimarama said the real motive was to incite mutiny. He added, "From this point forward, I ban him (the Ambassador) from going on any military installation." The British DATT (resident in Wellington) received an equivalent message re his boss here. Since Bainimarama was already no longer talking with the Australian DATT, the message for Australia is only presumed at this point.

RFMF media statement expresses outrage

¶8. (U) At mid-afternoon, the RFMF spokesman, Major Leweni, issued the following media release:

Begin text: The RFMF confirms that the British, US, and Australian Ambassadors visited QEB today and spoke with Capt.

Teleni and Commander Land Force Col. Driti. The RFMF views the visit as one that is totally out of line and will not be of any assistance to the current situation.

It was indeed inappropriate for a civilian diplomat to visit a military camp and seek to speak directly to Officers. This is an invasion in itself and could be termed as trying to incite. As an Institution the RFMF is disappointed and would like to make it known that it will not be insulted by such visits.

Last but not least the recall of all Territorial and Reserve soldiers is to prepare for any foreign intervention. The RFMF is aware of a meeting in Australia where the Biketawa Agreement will be on the agenda. We have indicated in the past that the RFMF will strongly oppose any foreign intervention and this recall is an indication of how serious the Institution is and will prevent any such attempt. End text.

Coordinated diplomatic media response

¶9. (C) The three diplomats coordinated a brief response, issued 11/28 p.m. by the UK High Commissioner, who arranged the meeting in the first place:

Begin substantive text: The UK High Commissioner sought a meeting for himself and his Australian and United States colleagues with the senior RFMF leadership in country. Land Forces Commander Driti's office gave assent to the meeting, which took place on Nov. 28, with Acting RFMF Commander Teleni, Col. Driti, and the three diplomats participating. The diplomats raised concerns about the current civil-military crisis in Fiji, as instructed by their governments. Contrary to the impression of an RFMF press release, the subject of foreign military intervention never was raised in the meeting. End text.

Biketawa process?

¶10. (U) Fiji PM Qarase has asked the Pacific Islands Forum to convene a meeting of Foreign Ministers under the PIF Biketawa Declaration. That meeting is to take place in Sydney on Friday, Dec. 1.

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UN threatens end of Fiji PKO

¶11. (U) According to PM Qarase on Fiji TV, UN Secretary General Annan phoned him to say that, if the RFMF illegally removes the Government, the UN will withdraw Fiji troops from all UN peacekeeping operations. Presumably this would include Fiji's participation with UNAMI in Iraq. Annan reportedly is attempting to phone Bainimarama to make the point directly. Qarase added that he has heard the UN PKO office has already cautioned Bainimarama that a coup would create a ban on Fiji participation in UN PKO in the future as well. Note: Fiji has several hundred peace keepers in UN PKO ops, generating millions of dollars per year in remittances to soldiers' families. This threat will certainly grab the RFMF's attention. End note.

Comment

¶11. (C) As the Embassy Suva DATT has pointed out, we don't know what version of the QEB conversation today reached Bainimarama. He is volatile in any case. Prior to the ban, we had reiterated with Capt. Teleni our interest in meeting directly with Bainimarama on his return to Fiji. The actual conversation was certainly useful from our perspective in that the RFMF interlocutors seemed to speak relatively openly about what is motivating their boss and them. It also gave the three diplomats an opening to make sure others than Bainimarama within the RFMF hear Western views of why outsiders are so concerned about the current crisis and what

the consequences are for Fiji, for the RFMF, and for individual officers and their families if there is a coup.

¶12. (C) The Qarase-Bainimarama meeting for tomorrow in New Zealand is an opportunity, in principle, though both leaders would need to enter the arena with an open mind and with willingness to consider ways out of the current crisis short of a coup. Bainimarama's knee-jerk outrage about what was a properly cleared meeting with the Acting RFMF leadership may be instructive about the degree of confidence he has in his troops. Nonetheless, Driti in particular, but also Teleni in general, stuck pretty much to their Commander's line in the meeting. The situation in Fiji remains dicey.
DINGER